

In this issue:

Join Action: The Next Step in Pensions Fight

Lobby the Pay Talks

Institute for Learning Fees

The Battle for Jobs Starts Again

Joint Action: The Next Step in Pensions Fight

The schoolteacher union conferences held over Easter have given a massive boost to the campaign to defend the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS). The NUT, ATL and the NAHT (the largest school heads union) have all decided to ballot their members for strike action against the government's current proposals to drastically worsen pensions. If a yes vote is secured the plan is to organise joint strike action starting with a day at the end of June.

UCU members in Further, Adult and Higher Education will join this strike. Following our excellent first day of strike action on 24 March, the national executive consulted with branches and agreed that UCU will now prioritise working alongside other unions to make this day a massive show of strength.

This action could involve some 600,000 teachers and lecturers and, on top of this, civil service union (PCS) members, plan to take strike action on the same day. This could mean up to 800,000 trade union members taking action together unless significant progress is made in the talks currently taking place between the TUC and the government.

All teachers unions support the current talks and a negotiated settlement but believe the government at the moment is not taking the discussions seriously.

- They haven't carried out the valuation of the Teachers' Pension scheme, required by law, which would demonstrate the actual costs of our pensions' and with no negotiation whatsoever they have already implemented the change from RPI to CPI uprating of pensions from April this year.
- They are still intending to finalise their proposals to increase contributions by June this year – a pensions tax that will amount to a more than 3% pay cut.

- Although talking to us about this increase it is only about how to distribute the increase between different public sector workers

Joint union materials are currently being prepared in support of the campaign and we are discussing possibilities of some joint events in the lead-up to the action in June. We will notify members as soon as these are finalised. Current UCU materials which outline the threats to our pensions can be found at:

http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/g/9/defendtps_branchbrief_jan11.pdf

Lobby the Pay Talks

The first meeting with the Association of Colleges (AoC) on the pay claim for 2011/12 takes place on 19 May. Any members who are free at 10am that morning are urged to come along and make their views known over the outrageous 0.2% pay offer for 2010/11 and in support of our claim for a 4% increase for this year. The talks are to be held at Woburn House Conference Centre, 20 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HQ.

The full joint union claim is:

- 4% pay award underpinned with a minimum £750 flat rate increase.
- Negotiations to establish national guidelines on appropriate salary scales for genuine "associate teacher" roles within the sector to provide much needed guidance for an issue that is otherwise bound to become a flash point for increased local disputes.

Continued...

- Proactively promote the use of fractional contracts for the employment of part-time staff in FE as a way of addressing the sectors record on equality in employment and provide guidance to colleges that the use of fractional contracts is the simplest and fairest way to employ part-time staff in Further Education.
- Commission a joint independent survey on the range and quality of CPD opportunities for college support staff. The results of this survey should then be used as the basis for further discussions at a national level on support staff CPD.
- Negotiate a joint national agreement on the disclosure of information during the commissioning and procurement process.
- Negotiations on a National Agreement on procedures for lesson observations to provide guidance to the sector on best practice.

A claim for an increase in London Weighting is also currently being agreed by the joint unions and will be submitted at the meeting.

Institute for Learning Fees

Confidential talks that are being facilitated by John Hayes MP, Minister for Further Education and Lifelong Learning, are continuing between ourselves UNISON and ATL with IFL, and the AoC. The aim is to bring forward joint recommendations to resolve the current unacceptable situation of massive fee demands placed on our members before the end of May. Members will be aware that the talks were brought about following the firm stand by members against the fee demand. We entered the talks satisfied that there was a genuine commitment by the parties to resolve the issues but we are ready to ballot members on a boycott if necessary and to consider legal action where appropriate.

The Battle for Jobs Starts Again

According to our latest information over 2500 job cuts in 66 institutions are threatened so far this year in the FE sector.

UCU has a good record at preventing compulsory redundancies through determined negotiating and where necessary industrial action by branches.

Of course when we face year on attacks the situation becomes more and more challenging which is made worse by a growing trend of employers seeking "efficiencies" through worsened conditions of service, the introduction of non lecturing grades and in some places pay freezes.

The FE Committee of the National Executive has agreed to continue our policy of urging branches to take the strongest possible action when facing job threats and to co-coordinate industrial action in branches where ever possible.

The latest news on branches so far in dispute is as follows. It is very likely that more will follow.

Newcastle College had a very successful one day strike on April 12, with the college effectively closed. The dispute is over 171 proposed redundancies of whom 124 are teaching staff. The union has had a lot of good publicity both locally and nationally, particularly in relation to the enormous pay rise of Principal Jackie Fisher taking her salary to £260,000. The college has responded by withdrawing accreditation from branch secretary and NEC member Dave O'Toole. The branch is considering its next steps, meanwhile messages of support for David can be sent to: david.otoole@ncl-coll.ac.uk

Sheffield College took well supported one day strike over redundancies on 27 April. This has resulted in a firmer commitment from management to negotiate meaningfully. The branch has suspended action planned for 5 May but have plans for selective strike action over a two week period if the talks falter.

Belfast Metropolitan College – in the face of over 90 threatened redundancies the branch will be taking 3 days strike action from Monday 9 May.

South Tyneside College Branch are balloting for strike action with the result due Monday 16th May. The College are seeking to make 20% of lecturers redundant and 20% of those who remain will be downgraded - with a potential loss of 11k (a third of salary).

And last but certainly not least:

Chesterfield College has now withdrawn proposed compulsory redundancies. This has followed members balloting for strike action.